

IN his playing days for Leeds and England, Jackie Charlton earned the nickname 'The Giraffe.' A long neck he may have, but his head is certainly not in the clouds.

And that's why he is not treating tomorrow's FA Cup tie with Wycombe Wanderers any less lightly than the Football League meetings with such teams as Liverpool, Stoke or Ipswich.

For one name sticks in his memory like a bad dream — that of little Fourth Division Colchester.

He was in that super-efficient Leeds team of just three seasons ago that went to Layer Road and were sensationally knocked out of the Cup by the Fourth Division 'minnows.'

Don Revie's side went on to finish as runners-up to the double-winning Arsenal team that season — so Charlton knows that championship form counts for very little when it comes to the glamour of the Cup.

So what was the Boro boss's reaction when he heard the Wanderers had pulled off the impossible by beating Bournemouth at Dean Court in the second round replay. Well, if looks could kill there'd have been a few dead people around him at the time. And when someone suggested his side had been given a passport to round four, the atmosphere became decidedly icy.

Later, when I spoke to Charlton about the tie at Loakes Park, he was as honest and forthright as ever: "I simply hate going to play non-League clubs. They're a complete unknown quantity. I just don't fancy it at all."

"For a start I've heard about the slope on the pitch. It will be something we haven't come up against before and I'd have much preferred a Football League team. There's no joy in playing a non-League club. You're expected to beat them — and beat them well. If anything goes wrong and you happen to get a bad result, then it's a disaster. So we'll obviously be treating this game very, very seriously indeed."

Charlton is treating it so seriously in fact that assistant manager Harold Shepherdson has already been down on a couple of spying missions to watch the Wanderers.

The former England trainer, who now draws up dossiers on future Boro rivals for Jack Charlton, watched the replay at Bournemouth and came back with a glowing report about Wycombe's play. In fact, he told his boss at Ayresome Park that the Blues looked every bit as good as any Third or Fourth Division side he'd seen this season.

"They were well organised and played with real skill, flair and determination and I think we'll have a real battle on our hands," 'Shep' reported.

The FA Cup, of course, has never been a lucky competition for Boro. They've never progressed beyond the sixth round — and they've only got

there on three occasions . . . 1936, 1947 and 1970.

Big Jack, as he's affectionately known in the town now, has has an almost unbroken run of success since taking over as manager of Boro in May 1973. Within a few months of his appointment the whole atmosphere around Ayresome Park became electrically charged. His personal magnetism was almost all that was needed to change one of the most consistent Second Division sides for four or five years into title winners by the staggering margin of 15 points — a record for Division Two.

I say almost, because Charlton's other magical move was to persuade Bobby Murdoch, given a free transfer by Celtic in recognition for his tremendous service, to go to Ayresome Park.

Like Murdoch, Charlton was a one-club man until he came to Middlesbrough. Big Jack had

been at Leeds since leaving his home town of Ashington as a raw 15 year-old.

He made his debut for United against Doncaster Rovers as long ago as April 1953. That was in the Second Division. He had to wait another 10 years before Leeds won promotion. That, of course, was under Don Revie and it was he who told Jack that he'd never make a footballer. That brought Charlton to his senses — and later Revie told him he could eventually fill the No. 5 shirt for England.

Sir Alf Ramsey — then just plain Alf — agreed. In 1965 Charlton won his first cap in the match with Scotland. He went on to earn 34 more including playing a vital role in England's historic World Cup win in 1966.

His club career continued for almost another three seasons in which time he'd carried off virtually every honour going. How about this for an impressive list: 1964 Second Div.

championship medal; 1965 FA Cup runners-up medal; 1966 World Cup winners' medal; 1967 Footballer of the Year & Fairs Cup winners' medal; 1969 League championship medal; 1970 FA Cup runners-up medal; 1971 Fairs Cup winners' medal; 1972 FA Cup winners' medal.

That, by any measurement, is a magnificent list. Charlton added the Second Division title and Manager of the Year awards to it last season, his first as a manager. He's after more of the glory this season . . . and an FA Cup Final appearance at Wembley, leading out his team is one of the targets.

And that's why Wycombe Wanderers, who stand in his way at the first hurdle, will be treated with the same respect as any First Division opponents. So if there is an upset on Saturday it won't be because he's underestimated the Blues. As Big Jack says himself: "No way."



Deadly serious — that's Big Jack

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